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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE



FRIDAY, MARCH 26, 1943

SUBJECT: "THE FAMILY FLOCK FOR WARTIME FOOD." Information from poultry scientists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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The Secretary of Agriculture recently suggested that a family poultry flock is one good way to raise food for freedom. Poultry and eggs are especially helpful in a meat shortage. A family with its own chickens and eggs is sure of its own protein food and helps ease the demand on the market. Thousands of women who grew up on farms and know how to raise poultry can be of the greatest help in the country's food situation this year if they will turn to raising chickens.

Secretary Wickard said: "Chickens and other poultry can thrive on land too poor or too shady for a vegetable garden. If the zoning laws don't interfere, many yards in towns or suburbs, or even in cities, are good places to raise poultry."

Count on 10 chicks for each member of your family when you order your baby chicks this spring, suggests H. L. Shrader, extension poultry husbandman of the Department of Agriculture. But before you get your chicks, make the right preparations for housing, feeding, watering and keeping them in good health.

First, provide some sort of home for them. It may be one corner of the garage or any other small building. It may be a lean-to shelter, or even a good-sized packing box. Whatever the house is, be sure it has a watertight roof... substantial sides...and a ratproof floor.

Now make the new home clean and sanitary by sweeping and scrubbing it with hot lye water. Use half a can of lye in a 3-gallon pail of hot water. Cleaning with lye-water is especially necessary if chickens have lived in the house before

to save the new chicks from disease and insects left by the former tenants. Day-old chicks from a reliable hatchery come free from lice and mites. Give them clean quarters to protect them. And when you buy chicks, insist on those that are pullorum-tested. They cost more but the cost is worth it. You want to start out with healthy chicks.

Inside the new home you must provide a heated brooder to take the place of the mother hen... a low cover where the temperature is very warm. You can buy a ready-made brooder. Or you can make one yourself to care for a small number of chicks. Make one from home materials such as an old tub or a wooden box turned upside down and raised 2 or 3 inches off the floor. You can supply heat for the brooder by an electric light bulb hanging inside.

Get the brooder placed inside the chicken house and start heating it at least a day before the chicks arrive. This gives you time to adjust the heat and make sure you can keep it steady at 90 to 95 degrees Fahrenheit. New chicks need to keep very warm. Supply fresh dry litter for the brooder. Put in an inch of coarse, dry sand covered with chopped straw, shavings or other absorbent material. You have to change this litter often to keep the chicks clean, dry, and healthy.

Now about food and water. Fifty baby chicks will need feed hoppers 2 feet long. After the chicks are 4 weeks old they will be so large that they will need feed hoppers twice that size.

Chicks also need drinking fountains--and safe fountains that won't spill water and get the floor wet, and won't be large enough for the chickens to get in and drown. Chickens easily catch cold if they get wet from wet floors or litter. You can buy a star-shaped attachment to screw on an ordinary glass fruit jar. Fill the jar with water, screw on the attachment, turn the jar upside down in a saucer ...and there you have a safe, non-spill, non-drown drinking fountain for your chicks. Or use a tin can with 2 holes in the side place in a saucer the same way.

Both the feed hoppers and the drinking fountains should be outside the brooder...about a foot or 2 away from it.

Now about food. The young chicks will need a good commercial chick-starting mash, or a home-mixed mash made according to a good recipe. Get the recipe from your county agent or from the hatchery. If you buy commercial mash, remember that the cost of the mash depends on its food value. More expensive mash gives more food value.

The first few days the baby chicks will need frequent attention. You will have to teach them where the heat is and where to go for comfort. Watch to see that they don't stray into cold corners. A good way to keep them near the heat is to place a low cardboard fence around the brooder, just far enough away to reach the feed hooper and drinking fountain.

The first few hours watch the chicks to see that they are comfortable. The chicks will show you whether to raise or lower the heat, especially at night. If the brooder is too cold for them, they will crowd close to each other...or even pile up. At just the right heat they will spread out and "bed down, comfortable-like."

You will also have to educate your chicks in eating and drinking, but they are quick to learn. They may not be hungry on arrival but will begin pecking at bright objects. Chopped green feed on top of the mash attracts their attention. Mash scattered on newspapers often helps for the first feedings.

After the first few days the baby chicks won't need so much care. But remember that chicks are delicate creatures. Many have died because children have squeezed them in just trying to pet them.

You are welcome to a free bulletin to help you in raising chickens. Write to the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. and ask for the bulletin called "Poultry Keeping in Back Yards."

